11: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1958
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phenomenon is not at all unusual in South America; Wagley and Galvão report the Tenetehara belief in the demon, Zurupari, to have been borrowed by the Indians from the local Brazilian population.[7] Similarly, the Tupinambá culture hero, Tupan, became a mythological figure in many Brazilian tribes through the active agency of the Jesuits.

Another instance of this type of diffusion and syncretism may exist in the Mundurucú belief that the *Yuruparí* take the souls of their victims in order to recruit their own ranks. This may well be an aboriginal idea, but it corresponds suspiciously to the classical missionary teaching that the souls of sinners are taken by the *Yuruparí*, or Devil.[8] The absence of any concept of sin in the Mundurucú belief is not surprising, for missionaries have labored for generations without noticeable results, to inculcate the idea of sin and punishment among them.

The *Yuruparí* attack all people regardless of age or sex, but a class of spirits known as *ašik* is dangerous only to infants. There are hordes of *ašik* wandering over the earth, for the shadows of all people turn into this spirit upon death. Only the transformed shadows of little girls are dangerous to infants, however. The Mundurucú believe that these *ašik*, like all little girls, want to take the children for themselves, and they rob the child of its life to do so.

Like the *Yuruparí*, the *ašik* kills its victims by throwing a magical stone into them. The *ašik* is clearly visible to the shaman as a little person no more than a foot high; its skin is either black or white, and it is always very beautiful. To ordinary people unendowed with shamanistic powers, the *ašik* is visible only as a fleeting shadow. It is not at all remarkable, therefore, that anxious Mundurucú mothers often see *ašik* on the paths between the villages and the bathing places. These paths are considered to be especially dangerous, but the *ašik* also attacks in the village on days when most of the people are abroad, and only one or two women or girls remain in the village to tend the infants.

As a rule, the Mundurucú believe that safety from all supernaturals can be gained by numbers; the various malevolent beings are always especially dangerous outside the village and to the lone person. This idea functions to provide supernatural support for sociability and coöperation, and few Mundurucú hunt, fish, or garden alone, nor does any woman willingly go to bathe or draw water by herself. To be sure, there are other, more concrete and persuasive reasons for Mundurucú gregariousness, but supernatural concepts rationalize and support this aspect of the social structure.

The shaman must be called to cure an attack by the *ašik*, but there are also means by which such attacks can be prevented. Children are made immune by frequent baths in a solution of water and the crushed leaves of an unidentified shrub, and a piece of ginger root is almost always hung on the child's *tipoia*, or carrying sling, as protection against the *ašik*. Also, mothers bite off and spit out pieces of the ginger root as they walk along the paths between the villages and the bathing places in the belief that this will avert molestation by the spirit.

[7] Wagley and Galvão, 1949, p. 102.

[8] It is equally possible that this represents a modification of an aboriginal concept of the Yurupari. Métraux (1928, p. 58) notes the antiquity of this belief among Tupian groups, and the Mundurucú might well have shared this element.